VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm David Byrd.

Mainland China has reported 327 new confirmed cases of the coronavirus. But that's down from 433 the day before.

The World Health Organization says it is disturbed, though, that the disease seems to be spreading more rapidly around the globe.

As Lisa Schlein reports, the WHO says the virus can be contained if nations take the right measures.

The World Health Organization reports the number of new infections of coronavirus appears to be on the decline in China while the disease is spreading more rapidly around the globe.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus acknowledges this is a matter of concern. But he notes the virus can be contained if all nations take the right measures.

"If you act aggressively now, you can contain this virus. You can prevent people getting sick. You can save lives."

Tedros says this virus does not respect borders and nations must seek to prevent cases from infiltrating their territory.

Lisa Schlein, for VOA news, Geneva.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence convened his first meeting of the coronavirus taskforce on Thursday in Washington one day after President Donald Trump made him the government's point person for the epidemic.

Pence brought in Debbie Birx, the administration's global AIDS coordinator and a medical doctor to serve as his chief adviser, in responding to the virus outbreak.

He said the administration's priority is protecting the American people.

"The president has no higher priority than the health and safety of the American people. The work we're doing here today represents the most important work being done in this government today."

Pence is moving to project calm in his role as chief coordinator of the government's response to the new virus.

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A Turkish official says his country's artillery opened fire on Syrian targets early Friday after 29 Turkish soldiers were killed in an airstrike on the Syrian town of Idlib.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin said Thursday President Vladimir Putin has no plans to meet Turkey's president next week to discuss the situation in Syria. Reuters' Adam Reed has more.

Turkey has sent thousands of troops and heavy military hardware to Syria's Idlib region in its unprecedented insurgent to back the rebels.

Nearly a million Syrian civilians have fled over the last three months, the biggest exodus of the war.

Despite the rebels claiming a victory, Russian news agencies citing military sources are denying it.

Forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, aided by Russia and also Iranian militias, have gained ground in about 60 settlements in the last three days.

The Kremlin said on Thursday that Vladimir Putin had no plans to meet his Turkish counterpart, President Erdoğan, next week to discuss the situation despite statements by Erdoğan yesterday, saying a meeting would be likely.

That's Adam Reed of Reuters.

The United Nations warned Thursday that a locust outbreak in Eastern Africa is continuing to spread and threatens to intensify.

U.N. spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said locusts were sweeping across eight countries in the region: Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Tanzania and Uganda, and had just reached the Democratic Republic of Congo.

He said the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is warning the worse is yet to come.

OCHA warns that immature swarms - the most voracious stage of locust development - will emerge at the start of the upcoming rainy season, which is the most important planting season for some of the worst affected and at-risk countries in East Africa.

U.N. officials are calling for international support for farmers affected by the locust outbreak.

Wall Street markets continued to plunge for the sixth straight day on Thursday [about] because of investor worries about the economic impact of the coronavirus. AP's Mike Gracia reports.

The dropping on financial markets stemming from coronavirus outbreak worries continued in Thursday's trading on Wall Street.

The Dow Jones industrials plunged 1,193 points, losing 4.4 percent, to close at 25,763, the S&P 500 lost 137 points or 4.4 percent and the NASDAQ fell 414 points, shedding 4.6 percent of value. The S&P is headed to its worst week since October, 2008.

I'm Mike Gracia.

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